

THE CATHOLIC MISSIONS AND MISSIONARY SCHOOLS IN ABAKALIKI, 1922–1982

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Abstract

The history of Catholic missionary activities and missionary education constitutes an important aspect of the social and educational transformation of Abakaliki and its surrounding communities in southeastern Nigeria. From 1922 to 1982, Catholic missionaries established missions, churches, schools, and other social institutions that contributed significantly to the spread of Christianity and Western education in the area. This study examines the development, activities, and impact of Catholic missions and missionary schools in Abakaliki during the period under study. The problem of the study arises from the relative paucity of systematic

historical scholarship on the role of Catholic missionary institutions in shaping education, religious practices, social relations, and community development in Abakaliki, despite their enduring influence on the region's historical development. The research traces the establishment and growth of Catholic missions in Abakaliki from 1922 to 1982; examines the development and administration of missionary schools; assesses the methods employed by Catholic missionaries in evangelization and education; and evaluates their social, cultural, and educational impacts on the people of Abakaliki. The study is anchored on the Missionary Theory of Education and Social Change, providing a framework for examining how missionary institutions used education as an instrument of evangelization, social transformation, and cultural interaction. The study adopts a historical research methodology, relying on both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include missionary records, church documents, school registers, government reports, and oral interviews with individuals knowledgeable about the history of Catholic missions and schools in Abakaliki. Secondary sources comprise books, journal articles, and other relevant scholarly publications. The findings indicate that Catholic missions played a significant role in the introduction and expansion of Western education in Abakaliki, produced teachers, catechists, clerical workers, and other professionals, and contributed to literacy, Christianization, healthcare, and broader social development. However, missionary education also generated tensions arising from cultural differences, religious conversion, and the gradual displacement of

some indigenous educational practices. The study concludes that Catholic missions and missionary schools were important agents of religious, educational, and socio-cultural transformation in Abakaliki between 1922 and 1982, leaving institutional and intellectual legacies that continue to influence the area.

Keywords: Missionary, Religion, Education

Introduction

Roman Catholicism entered Southeastern Nigeria after twenty-two years from its establishment in Southwest Nigeria. In 1885, Father Joseph Lutz of the Holy Ghost Fathers Congregation led Father Horne and Brothers Hermas and Jean-Gotto into establishing the Catholic Faith in the southeastern part of Nigeria. They got to Onitsha on the Niger Coast on 5th December 1885. Upon arrival, the French Spiritan missionaries proceeded to the palace of the Obi of Onitsha, Obi Anazonwu, to discuss the subject of their arrival and to seek permission and cooperation of the royal father to carry out their evangelical mission. Among other things, Father Lutz had told the Obi and his chiefs that they had “come to live near you, to open a school, to teach your children and your good people, all who may wish to come and learn knowledge from the Whitemen of Europe” (Okeke). The Catholic missionaries went on to establish in Onitsha the first Catholic school named the Holy Trinity Primary School in Igbo land with a total of forty pupils comprising freed men and slaves, adults and children (Okeke).

Thus, from the beginning of the Catholic presence in Igbo land, the setting up of schools for the education of the people was central to their mission. All through their missionary activities in the area, the Roman Catholic missionaries made the establishment of schools their signature tune and the principal strategy for evangelization. In Igbo land, the success and impact of the Catholic schools in both the dissemination of Western education to the people and their conversion to Catholicism have been widely acknowledged. This has led to Igbo land being reckoned as the bastion of Roman Catholicism in Nigeria and the most successful story of Catholic missionary effort in Africa. It is also such that in the discussion of the education of the Igbo people, the story will not be complete without the acknowledgement of the contribution of the Catholic Mission. As D. B. Abernethy said, “All the Mission groups in Southern Nigeria were interested in educating the common people, but none served this cause more energetically than the Roman Catholics of the Eastern Region” (Abernethy 39).

This chapter is a glimpse into the activities of the Catholic Mission in the educational wellbeing of the Abakaliki people. The study sourced its data from both primary and secondary sources and adopts the narrative method of historical writing.

Theoretical Framework

Modernization Theory

Modernization Theory provides a useful framework for examining the historical significance of Catholic missions and missionary schools in Abakaliki between

1922 and 1982. Modernization Theory does not have a single founder or a single date of formulation. It emerged as a broad intellectual tradition in sociology, economics, political science, and development studies, particularly during the 1950s and 1960s. Its classical development was influenced by sociologists such as Talcott Parsons and economists and economic historians such as W. W. Rostow. The theory became particularly influential in American social science during the late 1950s and 1960s. Modernization Theory is based on the assumption that societies experience processes of transformation from predominantly traditional social arrangements toward increasingly differentiated, literate, technologically developed, economically productive, and institutionally complex forms of social organization.

One important assumption is that education can facilitate social transformation. Literacy and formal education can provide individuals with access to new forms of knowledge, occupations, institutions, and social networks. Within the Abakaliki context, missionary schools can therefore be examined as institutions that contributed to changes in educational attainment, occupational opportunities, leadership, and patterns of social interaction.

A second assumption concerns institutional differentiation. Modernization involves the emergence or expansion of specialized institutions for education, religion, administration, health, and economic activity. Catholic missions contributed to this process by creating organized structures of evangelization and education. The historical development of Catholic institutions in the

Abakaliki area therefore provides an important case through which institutional transformation can be examined.

A third assumption is that social mobility accompanies educational expansion. Missionary schools could provide pupils with literacy and qualifications that opened opportunities outside traditional occupations. Teachers, catechists, clerks, civil servants, and other educated personnel increasingly occupied important positions in emerging colonial and postcolonial institutions.

A fourth assumption is that cultural values can change through education and institutional interaction. Missionary schools introduced Christian religious teachings and new forms of moral instruction alongside academic subjects. Consequently, pupils encountered ideas that sometimes-complemented existing indigenous practices and at other times challenged them.

Modernization Theory is particularly useful for this study because Catholic missionary activity in the Abakaliki area involved education as a major instrument of evangelization and social transformation. The Catholic Diocese of Abakaliki's historical account traces Catholic missionary penetration into the wider area to the early twentieth century and identifies developments around 1922–1923, including the establishment of a school and church at Ishiagu. The account further records the establishment of St. Theresa's Abakaliki in 1938 and the subsequent expansion of Catholic parishes and schools. The relationship between Catholic education and evangelization is especially important.

Historical scholarship on Catholic education in eastern Nigeria describes the school as an important instrument of evangelization and examines Catholic education's effects on teachers, teacher training, vernacular development, women's educational opportunities, school administration, and emerging national consciousness. Thus, the school was simultaneously an educational institution and an instrument of religious and social transformation. The theory enabled the study to investigate how Catholic missionary schools in Abakaliki contributed to literacy and educational expansion in the area. The growth of Catholic schools provided increasing numbers of children with access to formal education. The Catholic Diocese reports that by 1960 it had 178 Catholic primary schools and that by 1967 the number had increased to 249 primary schools, indicating the considerable scale of Catholic educational expansion in the region before government takeover of mission schools.

Sources and Methodology of the Study

The study, *The Catholic Missions and Missionary Schools in Abakaliki, 1922–1982*, adopts a historical research approach that relies on both primary and secondary sources. The combination of these sources makes it possible to reconstruct the establishment, development, activities, and impact of Catholic missions and missionary schools in Abakaliki over the period under investigation. Primary sources constitute the major evidence upon which the historical reconstruction is based. For this study, they include missionary records, Catholic Church documents, government records, school

records, oral interviews, and newspapers. Secondary sources provide scholarly interpretations and contextual information necessary for understanding the primary evidence. They include books, journal articles, conference papers, and published works on Catholic missions, missionary education, Igbo history, southeastern Nigeria, and Nigerian educational history.

The study adopts the historical research methodology, particularly the historical-critical method of analysis. This method involves the systematic collection, evaluation, interpretation, and synthesis of evidence relating to past events. It is appropriate because the research seeks to reconstruct and explain the historical development of Catholic missions and missionary schools in Abakaliki between 1922 and 1982.

Early Catholic Activities in Abakaliki

The first ever contact made by the Catholic Mission with Abakaliki was in the year 1922 when Father J. Howell commenced his missionary journeys to the Abakaliki prisons to administer the sacrament of baptism on condemned criminals (Ottenberg 109). His early visits were irregular but later increased in frequency, prompting a few African staff of the prison to find a small place where prayers would be conducted for them by the Father during his weekly visits. Some of the initiating staff included the prison clerk Mr. Olofi, the District Interpreter Mr. Kojo, and Mr. Efiang, the Dispenser, all of whom were non-Abakaliki indigenes. Still in July 1922, Rev. Father Groez opened three infant schools in rural Abakaliki villages: one was in Iboko

Izzi; another in Amagu Ezza; and then in Igbudu Ikwo. The schools were temporarily closed in 1923 by Mr. Shelton, the District Officer, who frowned that collections were being taken from the locals to pay the teachers (McGettrick 256). In one of the visits to the Abakaliki prisons, Father J. Mellet, who was living with the old Father Howell, was the one who came. When he came, Father Mellet made a request to an Abakaliki ruler, Chief Okuta, for a place to build a school and a church but was bluntly refused by the native potentate who did not want to do anything with the Whiteman's ways (Ottenberg 110).

Following this, a group of soldiers living in the Abakaliki barracks, worried that there was no regular church to mould the morals of their dependants, decided to hire a teacher to teach catechism to their wives and children. Those soldiers included Corporals Banyong, Babili, and a handful of their other interested colleagues (Ottenberg 110).

From 1923, Catholic missionaries from Eke parish in the Enugu area began to make their own concerted effort to establish the Catholic faith in Abakaliki. Eke was the cradle of Enugu Catholicism, having been established since 1915 on the invitation of Chief Onyeama of Eke, who is reputed to have preferred the Roman Catholic Mission to the Church Missionary Society who had earlier established at Udi nearby. It has been suggested that the humanitarian and developmental credentials of the Roman Catholic Church rather than genuine love of the church was what prompted Chief Onyeama to invite the Roman Catholic missionaries to his area instead of

the missionaries of the Church Missionary Society (Omenka and Anijielo 265). Of the importance of Eke to Enugu Catholicism, Father J. Okoye had thus submitted: “It was indeed at Eke that the religious tree which spread its branches to other parts of Enugu Diocese was planted, watered and nurtured” (Omenka 265).

Thus, relishing their success and acceptance in the Enugu area as exemplified by Chief OwushiOnyema of Eke, the Roman Catholic missionaries at Eke were emboldened to explore the Abakaliki territories. From 1923 Reverend Father Davey of the Eke Parish set himself to the task of driving himself 100 kms on motorcycle to Abakaliki every Sunday to celebrate his third mass of the day (Catholic Diocese of Abakaliki). He started out encouraging the few persons in Abakaliki who were committed to attending catechism on weekdays and general prayers on Sundays.

In 1926, Father Vincent Davey sent a teacher who opened a school at the old KpiriKpiri area (Ottenberg 110). The school was almost exclusively attended by the children of strangers to the town, mostly civil servants—soldiers, clerks, policemen, and warders. It had only three native Abakaliki boys on its register, all of whom were from Izzi. The population of pupils in the school fluctuated as workers on transfer pulled their wards/children along. Notwithstanding, by the first half of the 1930s, the number on roll had reached 114 children, with about 30 of them being natives. By this time the school had a total of three teachers and Father Davey was still constantly visiting (Ottenberg 110).

The St. Patrick's Missionary Society

An event that occurred in 1932 gave a boost to Catholic missionary activities in Abakaliki. That year the papacy gave approval for the founding of a new missionary body—the St. Patrick's Missionary Society, otherwise known as the Kiltegan Fathers, which was founded by Father P. J. Whitney (Nwosu 47). It was a society of Irish priests and the principal missionary group that evangelized Abakaliki. Until the founding of this missionary society, the whole area comprising the present Catholic Dioceses of Calabar, Ogoja, and Abakaliki was still under the direct supervision and administration of the Holy Ghost Bishop of Onitsha (Ezeh 71). Such large responsibility engendered paucity of priests and the vast territory was not adequately evangelized or taken care of. At the time, there were only two resident priests at Ogoja who looked after the schools and churches in Ikom, Obubra, Afikpo, Ogoja, Obudu, and Abakaliki Divisions (“Catholic Diocese of Abakaliki”). However, the birth of the St. Patrick's Missionary Society of Ireland changed everything and caused the concentration of missionaries in those areas.

Events leading to the formation of the St. Patrick's Missionary Society had their origins in the 1920s in Southeastern Nigeria. Bishop Joseph Shanahan, a member of the Holy Ghost Order, was running the Southeastern Nigerian Catholic Diocese of 8 million people from Onitsha and had only 23 priests to assist him. He then decided to appeal to students about to be ordained in Maynooth, the National Seminary in Ireland, to give the first five years of their priesthoods to Nigeria

(Obi 153). At the time, it was normal for newly ordained priests in Ireland to go to America or England for a few years, but none had until then gone to Africa. The first student to volunteer for the Southeastern Nigerian mission was Fr. P. J. Whitney of the Diocese of Ardagh (Obi 154). He accompanied Bishop Shanahan to Nigeria in 1920 after his ordination in June of that year. Another priest from Dublin, Fr. Thomas Ronayne, ordained seven years earlier in Maynooth, also volunteered and travelled together with them (Obi 154). By the end of the 1920s, ten more Irish diocesan priests had joined them and worked together with the Holy Ghost Fathers Congregation in Southeastern Nigeria. As the years went by, the diocesan priests came to believe that what the Nigerian Mission needed was permanent commitment. They then decided to set up a society of priests who would be full-time missionaries. Fr. P. J. Whitney was chosen to lead the Society.

In March 1930, St. Patrick's Missionary Society was set up on a trial basis with Fr. P. J. Whitney as Superior. Its headquarters was established at Kiltegan, C.O. Wicklow, Ireland, where John Hughes, a tea merchant, had donated an old house and 20 acres of land for that purpose ("St. Patrick's Missionary Society"). From the city's name came the other name of the Society: "the Kiltegan Fathers." Kiltegan became a place in which the diocesan priests working in Nigeria could spend their holidays and also a base from where the upcoming Society could be organized. Fr. P. J. Whitney appealed in Maynooth, as Bishop Shanahan had done, and seven more priests again volunteered and went to Nigeria by the end of the 1930s. He also travelled throughout Ireland speaking of the

needs of Southeastern Nigeria and seeking the support he required to establish the Society as a permanent missionary body within the Catholic Church (“St. Patrick’s Missionary Society”). The success he recorded was such that by 1932, the time was set for the formal canonization of the Society whose motto is “Christ’s Love Compels Us” (“St. Patrick’s Missionary Society”).

The first three members of the St. Patrick’s Society were Fr. P. J. Whitney, the Superior General; Fr. Patrick Francis Whitney, his cousin; and Fr. Francis Hickey (“Saint Patrick’s Society for the Foreign Missions”). They took the oath of membership on St. Patrick’s Day, 1932, the day that Ireland celebrated the 1,500th anniversary of the coming of St. Patrick to Ireland. The primary concern of the Society was evangelization to those who had not heard of Christ before. They were also committed to the work of education and health services (McGettrick 80).

In 1934, the area comprising Calabar, Uyo, Ikot-Ekpene, Ogoja, Abakaliki, and Afikpo was carved from the territory once administered by the Holy Ghost Fathers and given to the Kiltegan Fathers (Akukwe 216). The territory was now named the Prefecture of Calabar and Monsignor James Moynagh was assigned the first Apostolic Prefect of the new prefecture. With this, Abakaliki and the other areas under the new prefecture received renewed interest and attention (“Saint Patrick’s Society for the Foreign Missions”). The dedication of the Kiltegan Fathers to the evangelization of this area was important given its special status in the missionary calculation of the Roman Catholic Mission. Unlike other

dioceses in the Onitsha Ecclesiastical Province, the Calabar-Ogoja-Abakaliki area held immense attraction to the Catholic Mission being that it had not witnessed the evangelical activities of non-Catholic missionaries as much as the other towns or areas in the ecclesiastical province (“Saint Patrick’s Society for the Foreign Missions”). Unlike what it was in the Onitsha parent field where the Roman Catholic Mission was preceded by the Church of England Mission and some other Protestant missions, the Catholic Church preceded the Protestant churches in this area (“Saint Patrick’s Society for the Foreign Missions”). Itigidi, Obubra, Ikom, and some parts of Abakaliki saw the presence of the Presbyterian and Lutheran churches before the arrival of the Roman Catholic Church, but the presence of those non-Catholic missions had not been entrenched before the Roman Catholic Mission made her entry into those areas in grand style (Okon 213). It was therefore important that concentrated attention be paid to that area in order to harvest the rich missionary dividends that waited. The 1932 founding of the St. Patrick’s Missionary Society of Ireland and its dedication to the evangelization of the area from 1934 was therefore apt as it caused the sending of priests and teachers to areas not reached before. In that same year, 1934, a qualified teacher was posted to Abakaliki causing the number of pupils and church membership in the area to increase. Classes also reached Standard IV and in 1937 the mission school became government assisted (Ezeh 163–64). In 1938, a semi-permanent structure measuring 100ft by 24ft was erected. A Father’s Rest House was also built in 1936.

In 1938, the areas comprising Ogoja, Obudu, Obubra, Abakaliki, and Afikpo were separated from Calabar and named as Ogoja Prefecture and later Diocese with Monsignor P. J. Whitney as Prefect Apostolic. Two years later, in 1940, when he resigned the appointment on grounds of health, Monsignor Thomas McGettrick took over the administration of the Diocese (Oken). These changes further enhanced the growth and spread of schools and churches, bringing them more and more into the ambit of proper supervision. Many more schools were opened at various stations including Abakaliki and this also presented new staffing shortages, a challenge which Monsignor McGettrick had to solve by recruiting teachers from the Anua parish in the Calabar Diocese from where he took up appointment as Prefect Apostolic. Abakaliki was given more teachers (Ottenberg 110–11).

The Setting-up of Catholic Schools in Abakaliki

In the Abakaliki area as elsewhere, great emphasis was placed on the setting up of schools to instruct the people in both Western and religious education. Following the principles adopted by the pioneer Catholic missionaries in Igbo land, especially Bishop Joseph Shanahan (Okon 215), many schools were established in the Abakaliki mission field. Accordingly, by 1960, there were 178 Catholic primary schools in the area and seven years later, the number had increased to 249 with a population of 38,820 boys and 12,120 girls (Okon 215). Schools were also opened for the purposes of training people for the priesthood, men and women. Irrespective of the difficult terrain of the area, the missionaries still carried out their missions.

The Abakaliki area even up to now has been particularly unfortunate in terms of accessibility. It is in the words of Thomas McGettrick still a “traceless prairie” (Catholic Diocese of Abakaliki 17) due to lack of road networks. In colonial times, Abakaliki was an impenetrable bush “crossed by unforded rivers and characterized by heavy, clayey soils which restricted wet season travel” (McGettrick 126). In a memorandum sent to General Babangida, President of Nigeria in 1987 by members of the Movement for the creation of Ebonyi State, they alluded to that when they reported inter alia about the place:

With an area of 5,935 sq kilometers it has less than 250 kilometres of tarred federal and state roads. In fact, one of its component Local Government Areas, Ikwo LGA is the only LGA in the former East-Central State, and probably the only one in the former Eastern Region which today does not have and has never had even one metre of tarred road in the long history of Nigeria even though impassable gullies designated Federal and State roads traverse it (Manton 1).

If that was the state of the road networks in the Abakaliki area in 1987, it could be better left to imagination what it must have been in the early to mid-20th century when the Catholic and other missionary bodies commenced missionary activities in the area. This was more so as the Abakaliki Province (present Ebonyi State) was part of the Old Ogoja Province which was known as the “lost province” and the “pioneer fringe” in colonial times (Elechi 377), names it acquired for its neglect, inaccessibility, and dearth of infrastructural developments. Yet, irrespective of the impassability and

impenetrability of the area, the Catholic missionaries penetrated the hinterlands and opened schools to teach the people (Manton 1; Buchanan and Pugh 93). Although they were Europeans who left behind in the home countries well-developed social amenities, they still accommodated themselves within the Abakaliki bushes in order to open up the people to the gains of Western education and Christianity. Up till today in the area, there are places which have not seen any other improvement in infrastructural developments beyond what the missionaries did.

Community Primary School, Okaleru umu ezeokoha (formerly St. Benedict's Catholic School), for example, has not received any government improvement of its structures beyond what the Roman Catholic missionaries did since 1958 when the school was founded (Anyanwu 177). Also, since the bridge the Catholic missionaries built in the area collapsed, no government has found it appropriate to replace it. Right now, pupils do not go to school any day it rained to avoid being swept away (Anyanwu 177).

The mission of the Roman Catholic Church to educate the people of Abakaliki began when Fr. Vincent Davey established a school at Mile 50 in 1922. The school was later relocated in 1950 to the place it presently situates at St. Teresa's Cathedral, Ndiegu-Abakpa, Abakaliki (Alo). Opened as a Standard IV school, it attracted people from all over Southern Nigeria especially from other Igbo land areas who took up employment there as teachers (Akam and Ifi 292). Immediately followings were the schools opened by Rev. Fr. Eugene Groetze at Iboko in Izzi;

Amuzu in Ezza South area; and Igbudu, Ikwo (Obi 293). Father McManus and Father Joe Kelly followed on and established schools at Ezillo, Achiegu in Ezza North; and Effium in the 1940s (Obi 293). In 1960 there were no less than 178 Catholic primary schools in Abakaliki and in 1967 had grown to 247 with a pupil population of about 38,820 boys and 12,120 girls (Catholic Diocese of Abakaliki 16). From this time the Church began to pay attention to the opening of post-primary schools in the area (Catholic Diocese of Abakaliki 16). They began to establish secondary schools and Teacher Training Colleges to receive and further educate primary school graduands and to cater for the explosive number of adherents being recorded in the primary schools. The need to establish Teacher Training Colleges became more important when it became the policy of Government that only mission schools with trained teachers would be qualified to be given Government grants and assistance (Mmuo 6). In 1956, the St. Joseph's Teachers' Training College, Igbeagu, Izzi, was established (Akam and Ifi 293).

In the secondary school category, the Roman Catholic Church opened, in 1961, the Saint John Bosco Boys Secondary School, Izhia; Saint Aidan's Secondary Boys School, Nwachi, umu ezeoka; Saint Edna's Secondary Boys School, Iboko; Holy Child Girls Secondary School, Sharon-Iboko Izzi, all in the same year. The first three secondary schools were for boys while the fourth was built for the education of girls (Akam and Ifi 293). Mary Knoll College, Ogoja, also served in the education of the people of Abakaliki. Under the bishopric of Thomas McGettrick at Ogoja, the Abakaliki area also saw the

establishment of schools for the training of Reverend Fathers and Sisters. To this effect, Saint Augustine's Junior Seminary, Ezzamgbo, was established in 1958 to cater for boys and the Annunciation Girls' Secondary School, Ezillo, opened in 1962 for the molding of girls interested in religious life (Akam and Ifi 293). In 1967, there were 247 Catholic primary schools in Abakaliki (Catholic Diocese of Abakaliki 17). Unfortunately, the educational humanitarianism of the Catholic Mission would soon suffer a setback as a result of political developments in the country which climaxed in the 1967 outbreak of the Nigerian Civil War.

The country broke into two, pitting the North and West of Hausa-Fulani and Yoruba against the East mostly inhabited by the Igbo. The three years of hostilities that followed saw immense destruction of human and material resources, especially in the Igbo territories where the war was mostly staged. In Biafra land, people suffered blockade, starvation and genocide orchestrated by the central government who even saw starvation as a legitimate weapon of war (Catholic Diocese of Abakaliki 17). The Roman Catholic missionaries who were mostly Irish expatriates saw the devastation of the Biafrans as unjust and swung into humanitarian actions aimed at alleviating their suffering (Catholic Diocese of Abakaliki 17). They organized reliefs and other palliative measures for the people. This humanitarian act of the Roman Catholic Church and missionaries would later see the government punishing them by snatching their schools from them and repatriating the majority of them from the country. The war ended on 10 January 1970, with the Igbo territories capitulating to the federal side. For the

Roman Catholic Church in Igbo land, it was time to be penalized for helping the Igbo pull through life during the war (Catholic Diocese of Abakaliki 17).

The victorious military government of General Gowon appointed Mr. Ukpabi Asika as the administrator of the East Central State (Akam and Ifi 294). Asika had been with the central government during the war and was rewarded by that appointment. He did not hide his resentment for the Christian missionaries for their decided stand with the Igbo during the war and promptly punished them. In a government Edict and White Paper titled “Public Education Edict: East Central State of Nigeria Gazette Number 3, Enugu, May 1970,” he announced government takeover of all mission and voluntary agency schools (Akam and Ifi 295). This removed the church from its ownership and management of its mission schools. As Obiora Ike said,

This meant that a very important vehicle and tool for evangelization through the schools had been removed from the Church in Igbo land. It was followed by the expulsion of all the missionaries from Europe as a punishment to the Church and the Igbos for the Biafra war. It was said that the missionaries had supported their faithful and given food and medication to the suffering people of Biafra. In blunt terms, the education authorities and government declared that evangelization or to use their very exact term “indoctrination” should not be carried out through the school (Achebe 209–11).

Bishop Thomas McGettrick of Ogoja (and Abakaliki Diocese), state that;

The civil war which lasted for thirty months brought its own share of sorrows; one of the greatest was the publication of Edict 1 of 1971 by which the Military Government of the East confiscated all our schools—primary, secondary, and teacher training. The buildings were also confiscated.... Just by the stroke of a pen without consulting anybody, the Government took full possession of all our schools. The East Central State was the first to take over schools completely. The total number taken over was 5,896 and out of that number, 2,996 belonged to the Catholic Church and in Abakaliki Diocese 249 of that number were Catholic schools; also five Secondary schools and two training colleges were taken over by

Government; that number does not include the schools and colleges in the Ogoja Diocese (Ike 5).

Bishop McGettrick further lamented;

Many of the teachers that the Mission fired for immoral behavior were re-instated. It was really a diabolical act... The Christian doctrine was only taught for one hour one day per week and was taught at the same time in each school, so the priest could only visit one school each week. It often happened that when the priest went there, he was told that the children were engaged in sports preparation. Alternatively, he was told they were making a farm or building latrines or otherwise engaged in some other occupation. The priest had to come away without giving moral instructions. It worked out that the children passed through the school without being baptized. It made the children indifferent to religion... In a few years, the tragedy will manifest itself in this country, when the most

intelligent of these children will become leaders of thought and occupy high positions in the country. The country may relapse to paganism or they may adopt communism or some non-Christian ideology (Ikime 30).

In the face of this ugly development however, the Roman Catholic Church did not give up. They did not just throw their hands into the air and relapse into self-bemoaning. In the years since they lost their schools, the Church has struggled to regain ownership of those schools and at the same time embarked on the establishment of fresh mission schools (McGettrick 141). In Abakaliki Diocese, this second phase of Catholic education has been mostly carried out under the direction of Bishop Michael Nnachi Okoro who took over from Bishop Thomas McGettrick as the first indigenous Bishop of Abakaliki (McGettrick 142). Determined to continue the educational transformation of the Catholic Church in the area, he established the St. Theresa's Nursery and Primary School in 1982, being his answer to the request of the Catholic Women Organisation (CWO) for a Catholic school where their children would receive quality and balanced educational attention (Anyanwu 191). In that same year, the bishop also granted the request of Rev. Father Alphonsus Iwueke and allowed him to establish the Madonna Secondary School and Vocational Centre at umu huali, a choice centre of training of their wards for many parents and guardians in the diocese and its environs (Akam and Ifi 191). Other priests and laity have since followed suit and have had many Catholic schools established in the area.

Summary

This study examined the Catholic Missions and Missionary Schools in Abakaliki, 1922–1982, with emphasis on the establishment, growth, activities, and historical significance of Catholic missionary institutions in the area. The study demonstrated that the arrival and expansion of Catholic missions in Abakaliki formed an important part of the broader history of Christian missionary activities and Western education in southeastern Nigeria. From the early 1920s, Catholic missionaries gradually established churches, schools, and other institutions that became important channels for evangelization and education.

It establishes that missionary education was central to the Catholic missionary enterprise. The missionaries recognized that schools provided an effective means of reaching children and, through them, families and communities. Consequently, Catholic schools became centres where pupils received instruction in reading, writing, arithmetic, religious education, and moral discipline. Beyond the classroom, the schools contributed to the development of individuals who later became teachers, catechists, clerical workers, civil servants, professionals, and community leaders.

The study also revealed that Catholic missions contributed significantly to the spread of Christianity in Abakaliki. Through churches, schools, catechetical instruction, and other missionary activities, Catholicism gradually gained converts and established permanent institutional structures. However, Christianization was

not an entirely smooth process. Missionaries encountered indigenous religious beliefs, cultural practices, social institutions, and forms of resistance. The interaction between Catholic teachings and indigenous culture therefore resulted in processes of acceptance, adaptation, negotiation, and, in some cases, rejection.

Another major finding was the contribution of Catholic missionary education to literacy and social mobility. Access to formal education created new opportunities for individuals who acquired educational qualifications and enabled some members of the local population to participate in emerging administrative, professional, religious, and economic occupations. Education consequently became an important mechanism through which new forms of leadership and social organization emerged.

The research affirms that Catholic education contributed to changes in gender and social relations. Although access to education was initially influenced by existing social and missionary attitudes toward gender, the gradual expansion of schooling created increasing opportunities for girls and women to acquire formal education. This contributed to the development of women who participated in teaching, religious activities, community affairs, and other emerging occupations.

Through the application of Modernization Theory as its theoretical framework, the study interpreted missionary education as one of the institutions through which significant educational, religious, social, and cultural changes occurred in Abakaliki. However, the study does

not regard modernization as a simple replacement of indigenous culture with Western culture. Rather, it demonstrates that the people of Abakaliki actively responded to missionary initiatives by accepting, adapting, negotiating, or resisting different aspects of Catholic education and Christianity.

The study also identified 1982 as an important terminal point because by this period the institutional structure and character of missionary education had undergone substantial transformation, particularly as the Nigerian educational system increasingly operated under government regulation and administration. The period from 1922 to 1982 therefore provides a useful historical span for examining the transition from the establishment of Catholic missionary education to its institutional consolidation and changing relationship with the postcolonial educational system.

Conclusion

The study concludes that Catholic missions and missionary schools were important agents of religious, educational, social, and cultural transformation in Abakaliki between 1922 and 1982. Their influence extended beyond the propagation of Christianity to the development of literacy, formal education, new occupational opportunities, social mobility, leadership formation, and community development. The establishment of Catholic schools created new avenues through which the people of Abakaliki acquired forms of knowledge and skills that became increasingly important in the colonial and postcolonial periods. The schools

produced generations of educated individuals who contributed to the development of religious institutions, educational services, government administration, and local communities. In this regard, missionary education became one of the foundations upon which subsequent educational and professional development in Abakaliki was built.

Nevertheless, the study concludes that the influence of Catholic missionary education should be understood within its historical context. Missionary education was simultaneously an instrument of evangelization, cultural interaction, and social transformation. While it introduced literacy, formal education, and new opportunities, it also challenged certain indigenous religious beliefs, cultural practices, and traditional institutions. The resulting changes were therefore neither entirely imposed by missionaries nor completely accepted by local communities. They emerged through continuous interaction between Catholic missionaries and the people of Abakaliki.

The study further concludes that the historical significance of Catholic missionary schools cannot be adequately measured only by the number of schools established or pupils enrolled. Their deeper significance lies in the long-term transformation of human capacities, social relationships, religious practices, and community leadership. Catholic education helped create an educated population that participated increasingly in the social, economic, religious, and political development of Abakaliki.

Ultimately, the history of Catholic missions and missionary schools in Abakaliki from 1922 to 1982 demonstrates that missionary institutions became important agents of historical change. Their legacy remains visible in the continued presence of Catholic educational institutions, churches, educated elites, and Christian communities. At the same time, the persistence of indigenous cultural identities demonstrates that missionary influence did not completely eliminate local traditions. Rather, the period produced a complex process of cultural interaction, adaptation, continuity, and change.

Thus, the study concludes that Catholic missionary education was a significant component of the historical transformation of Abakaliki during the twentieth century. Its legacy should be understood neither solely as a story of Westernization nor simply as a story of Christianization, but as a complex historical process in which Catholic missionary initiatives and indigenous responses interacted to shape the educational, religious, social, and cultural development of Abakaliki between 1922 and 1982.

Recommendation

This study recommends that the history of Catholic missions and missionary schools in Abakaliki should be preserved and studied as an important component of the area's educational, religious, and socio-cultural heritage. Future scholarship should adopt a balanced historical approach that recognizes both the contributions and limitations of missionary education while giving

adequate attention to the agency of the Abakaliki people. This approach will provide a more comprehensive understanding of the processes of continuity, change, adaptation, and cultural interaction that characterized Catholic missionary activities between 1922 and 1982.

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